

To the Editor.

SIR,

ON THE QUESTION OF CARELESS MARRIAGES.

The evil results of careless marriages and reproduction from the imperfect and immature are so obvious that it would appear almost superfluous to mention the matter in this enlightened age, were it not that many able writers are devoting their talent to the advocacy of early marriages and the production of large families. It was pointed out by a great biologist sixty years ago that "some animals are capable of reproduction at a very early age, before they have acquired their perfect character; and if this power becomes thoroughly well developed in a species, it seems probable that the adult stage of development would sooner or later be lost; and in this case the character of the species would be greatly changed and degraded."

This was probably meant to apply to the lower animals, but from observation of what obtained among various savage races I think it may apply equally to the human species. It is a significant fact that all known pigmy races married at a very early age, and as a rule there was very little moral restraint exercised over them in childhood. Veddahs, Mincopies, Akkas, Bushmen, and others of like diminutive stature and degraded appearance, married at about eleven years of age, the girls frequently being mothers before they were thirteen, and never seeming to attain to full-blown womanhood.

These dwarfish people contrasted very unfavourably with such splendid races as the Polynesians, Fijians, Zulus, Basutos, and others whose stalwart frames and noble bearing gave them a decided advantage in the struggle for existence. These more virile races were usually brought up under most strict moral restraints, and moreover, the men were not allowed to marry until, having attained a ripe age, or until they could prove themselves capable of supporting or protecting a family. Another significant fact with regard to these higher types was that the sexes were very carefully kept apart whilst in the single state, the boys being brought up under the men and trained in all phases of forest lore, in warfare, and manly sports, whilst the girls were kept under the strict supervision of the women. This was all the more easily accomplished as men and women, even after marriage, never occupied the same huts at night. But perhaps the most important of all for the production of healthy progeny was that from the moment a woman conceived a strict form of isolation was observed and she had no further intercourse with her husband for three or four years, until after the child was weaned. Under these conditions women seldom bore more than four children, and those children almost invariably enjoyed perfect health without suffering any of the childish ailments so common to children of civilised communities. These were all most salutary measures and tended to keep the people in a high state of physical well-being, and it is remarkable that in coming in contact with Europeans, those old-world customs were abandoned and these fine robust peoples now exhibit distinct traces of decadence. In some instances whole tribes have died out, whilst others are fast declining into a state of impotence. For decline of the Fijian Race see my "Are We a Declining Race?" Ch. IV.

The element in our civilisation which has proved so fatal to native races may in time be equally detrimental to ourselves. We have fallen away very much from the stern virtues of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, and there can be but little doubt that in our artificial condition to-day we are paying the just penalties not only of careless marriages, but of other evils of a kindred nature. What we require in future generations is not an increased number of people produced from the immature and physically and mentally defective, but a virile and sane population descended from parents of ripe age and lofty character.

With regard to age, several reasons might be given for deferring marriage until about 28 or 30. We have very few reliable statistics to fall back upon for information, but I can vouch for the accuracy of the following :—

A. was born of middle-aged parents in 1768; was married in 1794; was father to seven strong, healthy children, some of whom lived to advanced age. A. enjoyed the best of health and died at the age of 94.

B., the youngest daughter of A., was born in 1814, married in 1846, had four children, three of whom are still living with families of three, seven, and eight. B. enjoyed good health and died at the age of 79.

C., the youngest son of B., was born in 1857, when his mother was 43 years of age. Has never had a day's illness, and is now rendering full-time service in his country's defence. His two sons, now serving in France, are both healthy and strong, while his daughters all enjoy the best of health.

C.'s father was also born of middle-aged parents, led a vigorous life, and died at the age of 86.

I have made enquiries, but have failed to find statistics for four generations of healthy progeny from early marriages, coupled with long life.

WALTER HUNT.

To the Editor.

SIR,

WOMEN CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION.

Sir,—For the first time in history a European Great Power is to give 6,000,000 women a vote for a Sovereign Parliament. The importance of this revolution can hardly be over-estimated. Probably at the next General Election the number of candidates for the 702 seats of the next House of Commons will be bewildering in their number and variety, and certainly the issues before the country will be unparalleled in gravity and importance.

To quote a few figures : In London alone we may expect some 600,000 women voters; in York, 11,000; and in Hull, 38,000; whilst in other cities the number of such voters new to the ballot-box will exceed the total male electorate at the last General Election. Even if existing party organisations include some small fractions of great numbers of women voters, such organisations have awakened them to national problems merely upon Party lines.

Hence it is obvious that something wide, more patriotic, more national and more educative is needed to utilise the woman vote in the highest service of the nation.

This great problem has received the continuous attention of the National Union of Women Workers since last summer, and that great body, which already affiliates to itself 153 women's societies, with a membership of 2,500,000 women, has prepared and already put into operation a plan for organising women in local and autonomous Women Citizens' Associations all over the country. Such associations are to be non-sectarian, non-party, and in the main educative; not only in the sense of supplying exact information, but in that wider expansion of mind and sympathies which will result from drawing together women of all classes and occupations. The associations are to be broad enough for all women to find in them a political and social school for the service of their country. It is needless to remark that in no sense will they foster sex-antagonism, nor become a "Women's Party." By helping the Motherland in this epoch of trial the association will necessarily help men, by developing and applying the powers and sympathies latent in that sex to